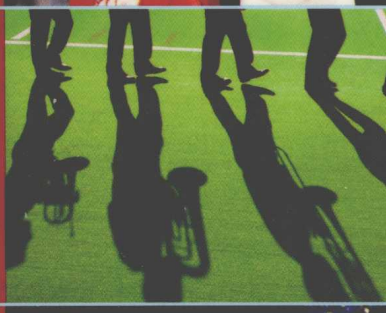
SCHOLASTIC JOURNALISM

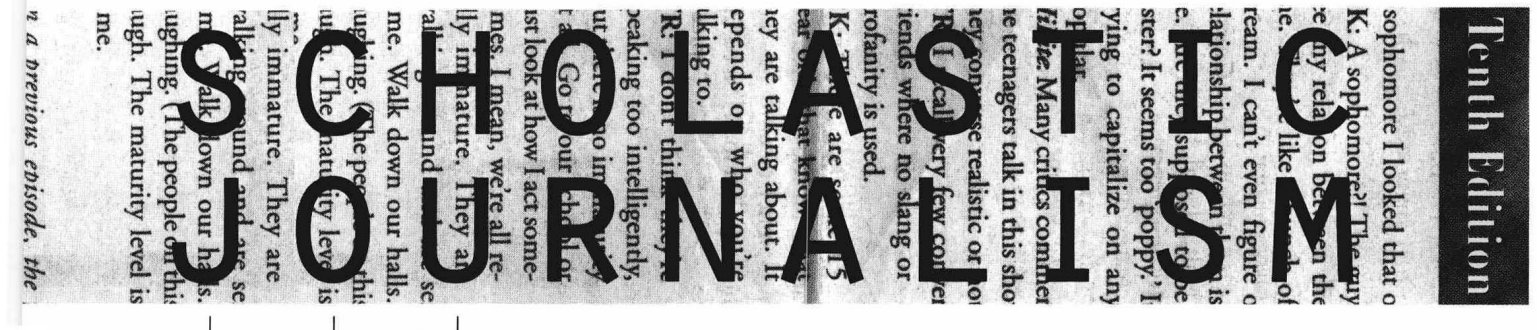
Tenth Edition

TOM E. ROLNICKI

C. DOW TATE

SHERRI TAYLOR





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PREFACE

After 10 years of personal training with a coach, a student at your school qualifies for the summer Olympics. She is a diver and has already won several national titles. As a reporter for your high school print and online newspaper, you write a story about her achievements. Your story will be read by hundreds of students at your school and others. The day the paper is published, your story is big news. Tomorrow, another person, another event is in the spotlight, and another reporter's work is praised. That's the fleeting nature of most journalism, but knowing that you were first to tell a story to the world is still satisfying.

Journalism is the first draft of history. High school journalists, whether they are reporting for their school newspaper, yearbook, magazine, broadcast news program or web site, are covering stories today that later may be significant milestones of the history of our nation and world community. This realization can inspire some to excel, to do their best, and others to shy away without trying.

High school journalism is serious business, full of excitement and potential. It's for those who understand its importance, accept its challenges and push its boundaries beyond the traditional forms of print and broadcast into new mediums made possible through telecommunications, the Internet and computers.

High school journalism is all about today and tomorrow, all about the application of new media, new technology and all the skills developed through the centuries to inform, entertain and persuade others.

If there ever was a time to champion high school journalism as a training ground and an essential part of a core curriculum and praise its merits, it is today in this new century. Although it has barely begun, the 21st century is already characterized as the age of information. How we disseminate information and how we use it is at the center of our lives, and journalists are in the forefront of those who are directing the communications revolution.

This revolution, which began in the 1980s with the launch of desktop publishing, is evident in our high school newsrooms. There is not much difference in the kind of technology used to report and produce news at many high schools and at *The New York Times*. And, in some respects, there is little difference between the content of a high school newspaper or online news site than what is published in a commercial newspaper or other nonstudent media.

A big story today is likely to be reported by student journalists whether it happens in the school's community or thousands of miles away. With the Internet as a tool, the world is now a beat for many high school journalists. War in a foreign country, deadly violence in a school in another state, or pending legislation in Congress are all potential stories for the student reporter. By adding a student or local angle, these national and world stories are now common in high school media.

Canadian media philosopher Marshall McLuhan's "global village" is a reality for student journalists. Telecommunications has made Croatia as close as the Carolinas for students in Virginia.

The results of this access to the world, to primary sources and a wealth of information so vast it would be impossible to read it all in a lifetime, is great reporting and diverse coverage that benefits the readers. Student journalists are more professional, more concerned about accuracy and fairness than ever before.

Most long-term observers of high school student media agree that student journalism is better than ever. For the first time in 2000, a high school student won a Dupont award for excellence in broadcast journalism. He reported, on National Public Radio and in his school paper, the effects of the war in Kosovo on a high school girl who lived there. He found his source on the Internet.

If anyone is surprised by the professionalism of student media today and the exemplary work done by students who contribute to it in many ways, verbally and visually, they shouldn't be. "Journalism kids do better," according to leading high school journalism researchers, including Jack Dvorak, a journalism professor at Indiana University, and others. On the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examination, students who had taken a special intensive journalism writing course scored higher six consecutive years in the 1990s than students who had taken honors or Advanced Placement English and no journalism. By this measure and many others, journalism "kids" excel in academics and apply what they learn in journalism to other pursuits.

Journalism students aren't necessarily brighter than their peers who don't take a journalism writing course or don't participate in student media; journalism students are often just better prepared to assimilate information and communicate verbally. These essential life skills help them immeasurably in whatever they do.

Many of the most respected and accomplished journalists of the late 20th century—some still work in media today—began their careers as student journalists. They include Allen Neuharth, founder of *USA Today;* Bernard Shaw, CNN; Dave Barry, nationally syndicated humor columnist; Abigail Van Buren, "Dear Abby"; Katie Couric, NBC *Today Show*; Robert L. Bartley, editor, *Wall Street Journal*; and Walter Cronkite, retired anchor, *CBS News*. They, and so many others, attribute their success in part to the encouragement and satisfaction they got working on student media. Considering their successes later, journalism "kids" do do better.

Even though the tools journalists use today are different than they used 20 years ago and any one student who has these tools can be reporter, designer, photographer, editor and publisher of his or her own news medium, there is still great value in traditional and new student media published or produced at school. Group learning and teamwork, which are part of a successful student media program, foster leadership and responsibility. An adviser can nurture a fledgling journalist who one day may become a

network news anchor, editor of *The New York Times*, or winner of a Pulitzer Prize.

Journalism teachers and media advisers who are preparing today's journalism students—the "kids" who do better—to become astute media consumers and tomorrow's media leaders need some help with this important job. For more than 50 years, this textbook has answered that need.

Scholastic Journalism meets the needs of teachers and advisers who are looking for a comprehensive textbook for beginning and advanced journalism classes and a resource for student newspaper and yearbook production. With its emphasis on reporting and writing, it is also useful for new media—Internet news sites—and broadcast news programs. The chapters on ethics and law are increasingly essential for everyone, including the adviser. The many examples of exemplary student work—long a distinguishing characteristic of this text—inspire students to meet and exceed the standards set by their peers.

The authors are committed to diversity, fairness and equality. Examples of student work feature a multicultural population. References within chapters, such as Chapter 12, "Using Journalism Style," include points on diversity. Student media are encouraged to welcome all students of all population groups into their ranks, for diversity contributes to excellence. Paraphrasing what Professor Dvorak said, journalism kids of all colors, religions, ethnic origins, sexual orientations and social backgrounds "do better." All educators and the authors of this textbook want all "kids" to succeed.

Scholastic Journalism's authors are indebted to the students, advisers and others who shared their work and their helpful advice so a new generation of students could continue the tradition of student-published media in secondary schools. It's a tradition of excellence that is one of the most practical, beneficial and personally rewarding activities and courses of study within the school. Thank you Professor Dvorak and colleagues for proving what many already suspected.

Now, armed with this textbook, students must live up to this accolade and keep doing better as they report the first drafts of history in this new century.

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A Tribute

For more than 50 years Earl English and Clarence Hach trained tens of thousands of students to become journalists through nine editions of *Scholastic Journalism*. The book became a "best-seller" and the standard for all others that followed it. Its half-century of success is a tribute to their dedication, wisdom and love of student journalism. With each new edition, their desire to improve the book and keep it current was unfailing. The book achieved the status as the best of its kind, and this pleased both of them greatly. They always were the consummate teachers. Clarence led the English and journalism programs at Evanston Township High School (Illinois) for many years, and Earl served as the dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, Columbia, for decades. Clarence died in 1998, and Earl died in 2000. The 10th edition of *Scholastic Journalism* is dedicated to them.

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Chapter 1

Understanding News

The president of the United States played golf yesterday. You played golf yesterday too. Today, your city newspaper has a picture of the president playing golf on an inside news page; there is no picture of you on the golf course, even though you got a hole-in-one on the ninth, and the president, reportedly, rarely breaks 100 on 18 holes. Why wasn't your achievement reported?

The difference has to do with what news is and what it isn't. Understanding news is fundamental to writing for a news medium, be it a newspaper, magazine, yearbook, broadcast station or Internet site. It is important because it enables a reporter to sort and prioritize information and help readers distinguish between what is relevant—what they need to know—and what is less important, even though readers may be interested in the subject. This understanding of news is also useful to reporters so they can make all stories appealing to readers. Faced with busy readers who can get their news from print, broadcast and Internet sources, a reporter who knows what news is will likely write better than one who doesn't. Delivering information fast and first are two goals of most news organizations today, but the consumer will rely upon and trust that source that delivers it with accuracy and relevance.

The president made news by golfing and you didn't simply because he is the president and you aren't. That's called *prominence*, and it's just one of the many aspects of the definition of news to be explored here.

A DEFINITION OF NEWS

The president as a golfer and why he made news is easily understood, but this is only one part of a more complex definition of news. News, by definition, isn't an orderly, exact list of "it's always this, but never that." Circumstances and nuances can change almost anything into news.

To arrive at an understanding of news, the following points are important to know:

1. News must be factual, yet not all facts are news.
2. News may be opinion, especially that of a prominent person or an authority on a particular subject.
3. News is primarily about people, what they say and do.
4. News is not necessarily a report of a recent event.
5. What is important news to one community or school may be unimportant or have little or no news value in another community or school.
6. What is news in one community or school may be news in every community or school.
7. What is news today is often not news tomorrow.

8. What is news for one person may not be news for another.
9. Two factors necessary to news, interest and importance, are not always synonymous.

Of these nine points, numbers 4 and 9 may need further explanation.

The full text of a news story need not be about a recent occurrence. Often only the first paragraph and one or several follow-up paragraphs contain the facts or opinions that make an old story news again. An event that happened months or even years ago may be news if it has just been disclosed. In the midst of a political campaign, for example, often something in a candidate's past is revealed. Events that have not yet happened may be news.

Interest and importance are not always synonymous because the most important news story is not often the most interesting or compelling one. For example, two stories appear on page 1: the school board announces the building of a new gymnasium for the school and the school's athletic director is being sued for sexual harassment by one of the school's coaches. If you didn't know about either event before the stories were published, which one would you read first? Which would be more interesting to you? Which would be more important and have a greater impact on you? If you think the sexual harassment suit is more interesting than building a new gym, but you think the new gym will have a greater impact on your life, then this illustrates the conflict between important and interesting regarding news value. There are many variables, and personal preference is one of them.

Occasionally a story that receives the most display in a newspaper or time on television or radio is often not very important to most readers or listeners. However, editors decided to devote extensive space or time to the story because it has one or more unique characteristics, sometimes involving a conflict. For example, a story about the rescue of a mountain climber stranded on Mount Everest may not be important to the majority of readers or viewers, but it is interesting to many because of the man against nature conflict that is a big part of the story. When planning their lead or most prominently displayed stories, editors for all media will consider both importance and interest and then choose stories with both elements for the prime, lead-off positions.

HARD NEWS AND SOFT NEWS

News can further be defined as either hard or soft; the difference, to the news consumer, is sometimes obvious and sometimes not.

Hard news has significance for relatively large numbers of readers, listeners and viewers about *timely* events that have just happened or are about to happen in government, politics, foreign affairs, education, labor, religion, courts, financial markets and the like.

Soft news is usually less important because it entertains, though it may also inform, of course, and is often less timely than hard news. It includes human interest and feature stories that may often relate to hard news. It appeals more to emotions than the intellect and the desire to be informed.

For example, the announcement by a software company of its plans to issue public stock is a hard news story. A companion story about the person who started this same software company and her collection of motorcycles is soft news.

Hard news, despite its importance, usually attracts fewer readers, listeners or viewers because it unfortunately is less interesting to many or is often more difficult to understand than soft news, particularly if one has not been following a continuous story every day. Though reporters always "fill in" some essential background, readers need to think about the information presented to comprehend its significance. As a result, much straight reporting of facts for hard news has given way to interpretive reporting in which the reporter explains the significance of facts and gives the background necessary for people to understand what they read, hear or see. Often, this type of story is written by an experienced reporter who is an expert, for example, in foreign affairs or in science. This interpretation, which sometimes borders on informed opinion, usually carries the writer's byline.

In radio and television, this type of interpreted news will be presented by a commentator or by a specialist in the type of news such as in politics. Many reporters and commentators become well-known, and their bylines are sought by readers, listeners and viewers who wish to hear or read stories by certain news analysts or specialists. Today there are special television and radio shows and Internet sites devoted exclusively to discussions of news events. *Meet the Press, Crossfire* and *Washington Week in Review* are just a few of the many broadcast and cable television shows that feature

journalists analyzing the news. These shows are comparable to the editorial pages in print newspapers and appeal to those who wish to be well informed and hope to learn different points of view.

Most large newspapers have reporters whose expertise lies in the reason that make news—government, foreign affairs, law, education, science, finance, religion, entertainment and the like. Smaller papers depend on the Associated Press, Reuters, United Press International or a syndicate, such as the Tribune Media Services, for example, for nonlocal stories of significance. Many large radio and television stations and some Internet news and magazine sites have reporters expert in certain fields, such as state government. Reporters are stationed in the state capitol during legislative sessions. Smaller broadcast stations depend on nationally syndicated experts whose services, particularly news or features on health, entertainment and money matters, are purchased by the station. The television and cable news networks have their own specialists.

Many stories combine hard and soft news elements. Hard news about personal conflict may trigger an emotional response from the reader, listener or viewer. Skillful writers will often highlight a human angle to a story about an important subject—softening the hard news—with the hope of attracting a wider audience. For example, a news story about Congress lowering federal income tax rates will usually be written predominately as hard news, but some soft news elements, such as a description of how the change affects typical persons with specific incomes, will be prominently featured, humanizing an important but mostly uninteresting story. The human or personal angle will often be the lead or one of the follow-up paragraphs. By doing this, the writer indirectly tells readers why this story is important or relevant to them. Writers also try to add a local element to a national or international story for the same reason—to connect the important story to some aspect of the local reader's, viewer's or listener's experience.

CONNECTING FACTS, INTERESTS AND THE AUDIENCE

The basis for all news is fact, and there is a dependent relationship between fact and audience (reader, viewer, listener), fact and interest, and interest and audience. Essentially, the job of a reporter is to make facts interesting to a particular audience. Therefore a reporter for a school news medium should write all stories for those particular readers. A story would be written somewhat differently for a school newspaper than for a city paper. The audiences for each, though they may overlap some, are mostly different.

News, which must be factual, is based on actual occurrences, situations, thoughts and ideas. Yet, as already written, not all facts are news.

News must also be interesting, but not all facts are interesting to everyone. The degree and breadth of interest will vary. One story may have a high degree of interest for only a small number of people. Another story will have some interest for a great many. Still another story will have great interest for large numbers. This story, especially if it is also very important, will be the number 1 story and given the lead position on page 1 of the paper or will be the first story read on a news broadcast.

The death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 led to unprecedented international news coverage. Her death was clearly an example of a story of great interest, but not necessarily of great importance, to a large number of people worldwide. Though tragic and a personal loss to many, her death had little consequence for most people in the world. A hard news story with many elements of soft news, it was interesting to many because of her fame and prominence and the circumstances of her death. The war in Kosovo in 1999, though of great importance, was not of great interest to many unless their fellow citizens were somehow affected by the war. It was a hard news story, and reporters sought to add more interest to the facts by including personal accounts from the war's victims.

Editors realize that their papers, web sites or broadcast news programs should have broad appeal even for a target audience. They select a mixture of stories of varying degrees of interest and importance in the hope of reaching every audience member with at least one story of particular importance to that person. Simply, newspapers and news programs have something for everybody. Smart editors know the demographics of their audience and publish content to meet its needs and wants.

NEWS IS DIFFERENT FROM OTHER FORMS OF WRITING

News must be accurate. Factual accuracy means that